

Ambassador RORA NAVARRO-TOLENTINO was born in Cebu and also traces her family roots to Surigao del Norte. She is a career diplomat who has been in the Foreign Service for over 38 years. A lawyer, she was educated at the University of the Philippines, finishing Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service and Bachelor of Laws. She passed the Foreign Service Officers' Exams in 1971 and became a member of the Philippine Bar in 1974.

Prior to her posting as Ambassador of the Philippines to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, she was Undersecretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs with direct supervision over the five service offices of the Department (Personnel, Finance, Legal, Protocol and Consular), and served concurrently as Chief Coordinator of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

She was also the Ambassador to France, with concurrent accreditation to Portugal; Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO; Philippine Ambassador to Australia, with concurrent accreditation to Nauru; Deputy Chief of Mission in the Philippine Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand and at the same time, Alternate Permanent Representative to ESCAP; and Consul in the Philippine Consulate General, San Francisco, California.

In the Home Office in Manila, she has held various responsible positions, namely:

- Chief of Staff of the Office of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and currently Assistant Secretary of the Office of Policy Planning and Coordination;
- Director-General of the Office of Asian and Pacific Affairs;
- Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs;
- Acting Chief of the Research Division, Office of Policy Planning; and
- Principal Assistant, Office of Consular Affairs.

In recognition of her achievements as a career diplomat, the Philippine Government has bestowed on Ambassador Rora Navarro-Tolentino the following highly prestigious awards:

- DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD - granted by the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila in June 2000; and
- GAWAD MABINI, Rank of Dakilang Kamanong - granted by Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in Manila in July 2001.

She was also awarded by French President Jacques Chirac as GRAND OFFICIER DE L'ORDRE NATIONAL DU MERITE in Paris in July 1997.

On the family side, she is happily married to an alumnus of the University of the Philippines, Abelardo Tolentino, Jr., who is also a lawyer and is a businessman. They have two married daughters and a son, as well as two grandchildren, who are in the Philippines.

Philippine Embassy  
Berne, 3 June 2004

**Speech of AMBASSADOR RORA NAVARRO-TOLENTINO  
THE 3rd IGOROT CORDILLERA (BIMAAK) EUROPE CONSULTATION  
Aeschi, Switzerland, 07 May 2005**

As the Philippine Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation, I am most gratified and deeply honored to be invited by BIBAK-Switzerland to join you tonight for the Gala Night of the "3<sup>rd</sup> Igorot Cordillera (BIMAAK) Europe Consultation" which brings together many participants coming from various parts of Europe, the United States, and our country, the Philippines, for a 4- day Consultation that involves activities and in depth workshop discussions on your chosen theme: "Our Igorot Cordillera Culture: Heritage and Social Integration".

Although your Consultation commenced two days ago, last Thursday, allow me nevertheless to join BIBAK Switzerland in welcoming warmly our compatriots from Bontoc, Ifugao, Mountain Province, Abra, Apayao and Kalinga to Switzerland - a country that highly values the preservation and promotion of cultural identity and heritage even as it encourages and supports the harmonious integration of migrants into Swiss society. It is in this context that BIBAK Switzerland exemplifies a model Filipino-Swiss organization because its members are dedicated to pursuing the preservation of their authentic Igorot culture, customs and traditions while endeavoring to adapt to Swiss life and environment.

In speaking so highly of BIBAK Switzerland, I take this opportunity to acknowledge with deep gratitude its positive role in strengthening the Filipino community in Switzerland by its active participation in and solid support for joint activities embarked together with the Philippine Embassy since its foundation on September 16, 2000. Notably, BIBAK Switzerland actively participates in the annual Philippine Independence Day celebrations held jointly by the Filipino community and the Philippine Embassy since I assumed my post as Ambassador 5 years ago. Likewise, BIBAK Switzerland regularly attends the Embassy's meetings with Filipino community leaders which I chair throughout the year.

When Sabina Kuenzi extended to me BIBAK Switzerland's invitation to this event, she kindly provided me some background information of the international movement that strongly unites Igorots in different parts of the world. Thus, I learned about the Igorot International Consultations held since 1995 in California; followed by subsequent meetings held in Virginia in 1997, in Baguio City in 2000; in London in 2002; and in St. Louis, Missouri in 2004 - with early plans to hold the 6th Igorot International Consultation in Australia in 2006. In between these International Consultations are the BIMAAK European Consultations first held in Belgium in 2001; followed by the one held in Austria in 2003; and now, here in Switzerland in 2005.

The global momentum for solidarity among the Igorots is based on shared goals and aspirations among the indigenous peoples of the Cordillera - a region rich in natural resources, diverse in the ethno-linguistic identities of its communities yet closely united by its common identity traced to similar core values, cultural background and the basic root of the Ilocano language.

Today, the Philippine Government has included the Cordillera Administrative Region (or CAR) as an integral part in the Regional Development and Priority Investment Areas under the 2003 NEDA Workplan. Priority projects are being pursued to develop the CAR as a Watershed Cradle; as a major hydropower energy producer; as an eco-tourist destination; as a food basket; as a prime educational center and as a producer of light industry and agro-industrial products.

To the outside world, the Igorots are best associated with the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, often referred to as the Ifugao Rice Terraces, which was inscribed in the World Heritage List of the UNESCO in 1995. This historic inscription happily coincided with the time when I was then serving in Paris as the Philippine Permanent Representative to UNESCO. Describing the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras as "outstanding example of living cultural landscapes", the UNESCO noted the following official description: "For 2000 years, the high ricefields of the Ifugao have followed the contours of the mountains. The fruit of knowledge handed down from one generation to the next, and the expression of sacred traditions and a delicate social balance, they have helped to create a landscape of great beauty that expresses the harmony between humankind and the environment."

Indeed, every Filipino shares the pride of the Igorot people in this international recognition of the universal value of their unparalleled achievements. Moreover, every Filipino must be aware and recognize the unique legacy of the Rice Terraces of the Cordilleras as the only monument in the Philippines that shows no evidence of having been influenced by colonial culture. In citing this historical fact, the nomination for World Heritage List further stated:

"Owing to the difficult terrain, the Cordillera tribes are among the few peoples of the Philippines who have successfully resisted any foreign domination and have preserved their authentic tribal culture. The history of the rice terraces is intertwined with that of its people, their culture and their traditional practices."

I have taken the effort to share with you this valuable information because it is relevant to the Workshop topics/or questions that you dealt with yesterday, namely: First, "What are the core values and other aspects of the Igorot Culture we hold dear and special, which we want to pass on to the next generation?" and second, for the 2nd Generation: "What are the core values and other aspects of the Igorot culture that we want to have?"

I understand that specific topics of interest were also taken up in your Workshop discussions yesterday, including among others the following subjects:

1. Aging Migrants;
2. Reintegration;
3. Cordillera Concerns and Migrant Issues; and
4. Stories of our Igorot Culture.

From these discussions, I am told that participants will be submitting "Workshop Reports" including "Conclusions and Recommendations" for consideration by the entire body. Indeed, this requires serious reflection, evaluation and dedication. In my mind, this is a highly commendable undertaking for which I congratulate every participant in the ongoing "3rd Igorot Cordillera (BIMAAK) Europe Consultation."

May the fervor of your commitment and the patriotism of your endeavors - as you, at the same time provide an important network of mutual support for each other - be forever strong. May you remain united and faithful to your goals through the years ahead. Lastly, may the Almighty bless all of the Consultation participants and the Igorot people in the Philippines and abroad to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow with resounding success.

I look forward to being updated about the deliberations in your future Consultations. Once again, let me thank you all for letting me be a part of your worthy undertaking.

Mabuhay po kayong lahat! Maraming salamat po!